

The STATE of EDUCATION *in* RHODE ISLAND

Lessons on the Progress, Implementation,
and Impact of the Comprehensive Education
Strategy (CES)



REPORT #2

Parent Involvement and Engagement in Rhode Island's Schools: 1997-2000

*by Anne M. Seitsinger, Ph.D., Robert D. Felner, Ph.D., Minsuk Shim, Ph.D., Antoinette Favazza, Ed.D.,
Stephen Brand, Ph.D., Kenneth Gu, Ph.D., and their colleagues at NCPE*



Prepared for the
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
by the National Center on Public Education and Social Policy,
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Parent Involvement and Engagement in Rhode Island Schools: 1997-2000

Parents¹ are their children's first teachers. As children enter school, teachers join parents in influencing their continued growth and development. Successful educational and developmental outcomes are shared by effective relationships among the primary caregivers across the different contexts of children's lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

As schools move toward comprehensive school reform, the roles and responsibilities of key players in the educational system have shifted and been redefined (Conley, 1993; Murphy, 1993). Nowhere is this more evident than for parents' roles in schools and the education of their children. Parents have moved from outsiders to partners in transforming American education, blurring boundaries between school and home, school and community, and faculty and families. From governance on school improvement teams, to participation in school events and support of student learning at home, parents are being asked to enter into partnerships with schools and teachers to shape the educational outcomes of students (Epstein, 1995; Swap, 1993; Vincent, 1996). To be effective partners, parents need to know what is happening in schools and how they can work with and support schools to create learning environments at home and school that ensure success for all children, and particularly their own.

Ways Families Are Involved in Education

In response to the call for greater parent involvement in education, schools have generated a broad range of strategies to involve families in their children's education. Many authors have grouped parent involvement in various ways (e.g., Comer, 1991; Epstein, 1995). Examination of these and other work reveals that strategies for engaging parents in education can be broadly categorized as focusing on personal, participatory, and

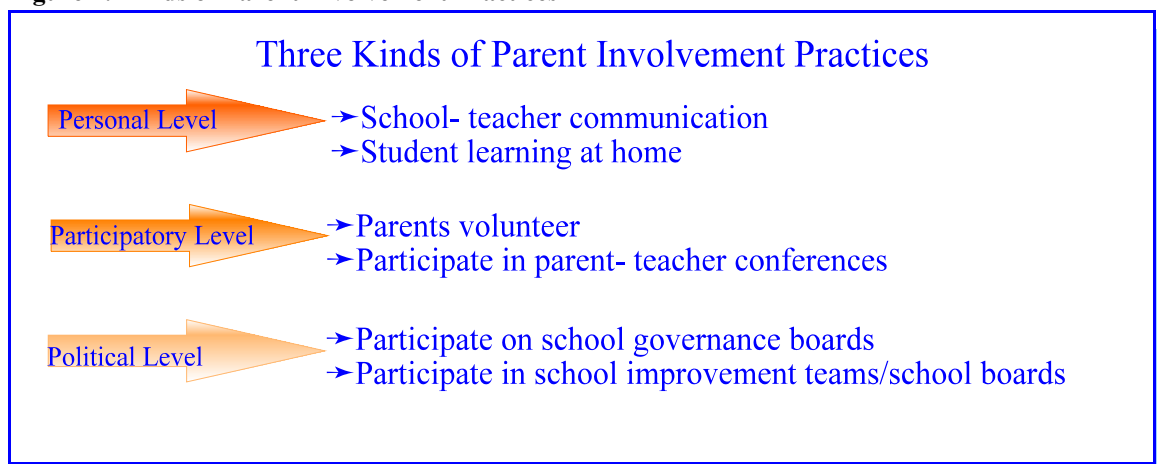
¹ Throughout this report, the words "parents" and "families" are used interchangeably. They include parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers in the home.

political practices and roles (see **Figure 1**). Parent involvement at the *personal level* includes both communication with teachers, as well as active support for student learning at home. At the *participatory level*, parents may volunteer at school, help with school-sponsored events, and participate in the parent-teacher organization. Parent involvement at the *political level* encompasses participation on school governance boards, school improvement teams, and/or school boards.

Why Involve Families?

It has been argued that parent involvement is an essential component of high-performance schools (Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, 1989; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996; National Middle School Association, 1997) and a national priority (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1990). These groups posit that as family involvement increases so too does student success (Henderson, 1987; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Some studies have found that students whose families are more knowledgeable, supportive, and involved in their education perform better academically and exhibit more positive attitudes toward school, have higher expectations, and exhibit more positive behaviors (e.g., Clark, 1983; Epstein, 1992).

Figure 1: Kinds of Parent Involvement Practices



What Does Salt Survey Data Tell Us about Family Involvement?

The SALT Surveys² collect information about family involvement from teachers, administrators, parents, and students. Teachers report their views on the importance of parent involvement, the amount of contact they have with parents/guardians, and how they attempt to involve and engage their students' families in educationally relevant ways. School administrators describe school-wide programs to involve parents and parents' roles in decision-making regarding school policies, as well as their own views on parent involvement. Parents also report on their involvement with their children's education and ways in which they would like to be more involved, more supported and/or informed by schools. In addition, the SALT Survey asks students about educational activities with their teachers and families.

This report discusses a representative first set of findings about family involvement in Rhode Island's schools and in the education of our students from the perspectives of these four sets of key informants. It is based on information we collected during the first three years of the SALT Survey process (i.e., 1997-98, 1998-99, and 1999-2000 school years). For each of these three years, more than 7,000 teachers, 400 administrators, 44,000 parents, and 81,000 students responded. Overall, this information represents more than 1,200 reports from administrators, 25,000 from teachers, 135,000 from parents, and 254,000 from students.

Of the more than 7,000 teachers who participated in the SALT Survey each year, approximately 57% teach in elementary schools, 25% teach in middle schools, and 27% teach in high schools. This response pattern is representative of the distribution of teachers in Rhode Island's schools more generally.

² The SALT Surveys, known nationally as the *High Performance Learning Community (HiPlaces) Assessment*, are components of a research-based assessment tool and comprehensive school reform design developed by Dr. Robert Felner and his colleagues over the past three decades. For more information visit www.ncpe.uri.edu to view the descriptions of the surveys, other reports and related publications. (These reports are also available at www.infoworks.ride.uri.edu).

The overarching questions with which this report is concerned are presented in **Figure 2**. As we explore the answers to each of these major questions, additional, more specific questions are explored that help elaborate the answers in important ways that are discussed in each section. In Section I, we describe how educators view the importance of parent involvement and the levels and trends regarding parent involvement. In Section II, we explore the patterns and trends of practices used in schools to involve parents. How parents respond to these and other practices is discussed in Section III. In the next section, we discuss students' experiences related to teacher/school-family partnerships and their relationships to student outcomes. Finally, in Section V, we provide some possible lessons for future directions for enhancing parent involvement in Rhode Island schools.

Figure 2: The Overarching Questions Addressed in this Report

The overarching questions that are addressed in this report are:

- T How do educators view the importance of parent involvement?
- T What are the levels and trends of parent involvement in Rhode Island for the first three years of the SALT process?
- T What are the patterns and trends of efforts to involve parents by schools and teachers?
- T What do parents report as their experiences and needs?
- T What are student experiences of teacher/school-family partnerships and how do they relate to student performance and achievement?
- T What do the findings tell us about future directions to enhance parent involvement in Rhode Island schools?

SECTION I. Educators' Views and Levels of Parent Involvement

How do educators view the importance of parent involvement?

Before we explore the levels and patterns of practices teachers use to involve parents, it is important to have as a frame for these analyses an understanding of the views of teachers and school administrators about the importance of working with and involving parents. Our first set of analyses then deals with the question of how educators in Rhode Island view the importance of parent involvement.

Importantly for Rhode Island's reform efforts, Rhode Island educators are in agreement with national views on the importance of parent involvement in education. Rhode Island teachers and administrators typically see family involvement in the education of our students an essential building block of effective education. Attitudes toward family involvement represent the degree to which teachers are willing to "buy-in" to reforms focused on developing partnerships with families to support student learning and development (see *The State of Education in Rhode Island: Lessons on the Progress, Implementation, and Impact of the Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES)*, Report 1, 2001).

The vast majority of Rhode Island classroom teachers at all three building/grade levels typically report they agree that a broad array of parent involvement activities are "essential to effective education" for the students they teach (see **Figure 3**).

Rhode Island teachers and administrators typically see family involvement in the education of our students as an essential building block of effective education.

Figure 3

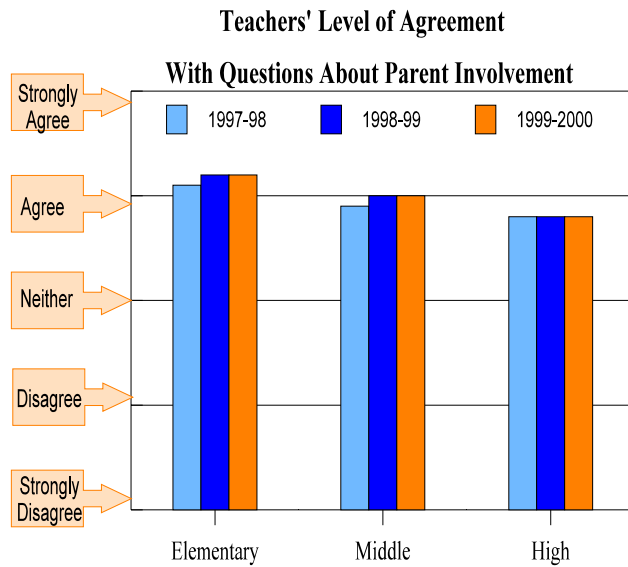
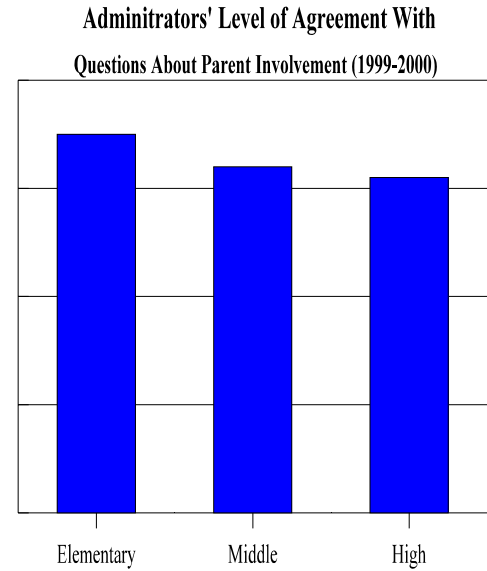


Figure 4



Consistent with the views of teachers, and even stronger, is the endorsement of Rhode Island’s more than 300 school administrators/principals. Annually, elementary, middle, and high school principals agree or strongly agree that parent involvement in education is “essential to effective education” of the students in their schools (see **Figure 4**).

Importantly, teachers’ levels of agreement parallel those of school leadership in that the strength of agreement with the importance of parental involvement in students’ education decreases by building/grade level.

As Rhode Island moves forward with its reform efforts, it must consider whether this decline is consistent with obtaining the outcomes it seeks. And, if not, work with building leaders and teachers at middle and secondary levels to consider the reasons for and solutions to their views of the somewhat reduced importance of parent involvement as students move through later grades in school. While certainly many authors have written about the need for the type and form of parent involvement to change as students move

through the grades (e.g., Epstein, 1992; Kellaghan, Sloane, Alvarez, and Bloom, 1993), the need for parents to stay fully engaged in their children's education throughout adolescence has been underscored (Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, 1989).

What are the levels and trends of parent involvement in Rhode Island for the first three years of the SALT process?

Specifically, this section focuses on teacher responses to the following set of questions:

To what extent do teachers report regular contact with individual students' parents?
What are the levels and trends in parental participation in more formal parent-teacher conferences?

The answers to these questions again come from elements of the SALT Survey. The answer to the first question comes from teacher reports on the *Teacher Student Rating Scale (TSRS)*. Teachers are asked about the degree to which they have contact with each student's parents/guardians. The answer to the second question comes from teacher reports on the SALT Staff Survey. There, teachers report on the percentage of parents of their students who attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences.

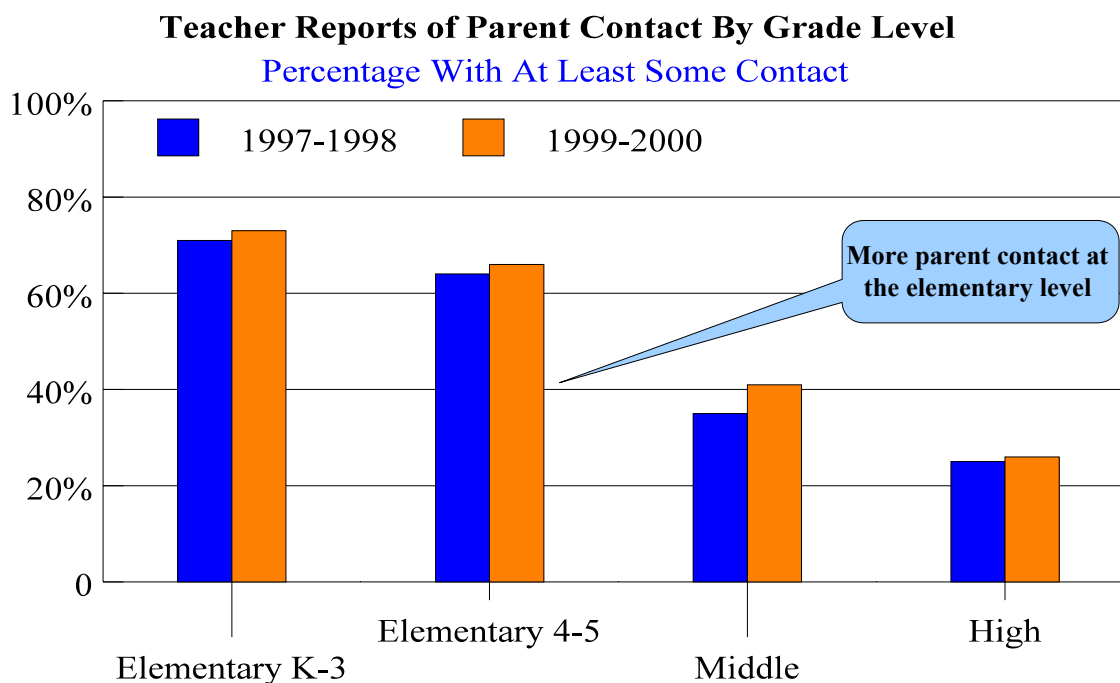
To What Extent Do Teachers Report Contact with Individual Students' Parents?

Reflective of, and far stronger than the decline in educators' views about the importance of parent involvement is the dramatic decline we find in the degree with which teachers report they have contact with parents as students progress through elementary, middle, and high schools (see **Figure 5**). As is shown in **Figure 5**, teachers of elementary students have contact with nearly *twice as many* parents of elementary school students as do those of middle school teachers and *three times* the number that high school teachers do. Elementary teachers report they have had at least some contact with 70% of their students'

parents/guardians. By middle school this percentage decreases to about 30-40%, and in high school it further decreases to slightly more than 20% of their students' parents.

There is some good news here, too. Despite this downward trend across grade levels, there has been a gradual but consistent increase in the level of contact within two of the three building levels across the three years of the Survey (see **Figure 5**).

Figure 5: Teacher Reports of Parent Contact by Grade Level



Elementary teachers report they have contact with slightly more parents than they did three years ago, and middle school teachers have increased the percentage of parents with whom they report having contact from 35% to 41%. Teacher contact with high school students' parents has remained steady at 25%.

What Percentage of Parents Attend Parent-Teacher Conferences?

Traditionally, parent-teacher conferences have been a primary avenue for building school-family communication and collaboration. They afford teachers and parents the opportunity to meet formally to discuss student progress and needs and to develop plans for supporting and guiding the student.

The percentage of teachers holding regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences increased from 79% to 85%.

From 1997 to 2000, there has been an increase in the percentage of Rhode Island teachers who report holding regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference at least once a year. This level has increased from 79% to 85% of all teachers.

The SALT Survey also asks teachers to report on the percentage of students whose parents attend such parent-teacher conferences. Consistent with teacher reports of contact with parents, attendance at parent-teachers conferences decreases by grade level. Overall, we see a consistent and disturbing pattern in the percentage of parents attending parent-teacher conferences by grade level (see **Figure 6**). **Figure 6** shows the percentage of teachers who reported *more than half* of their students' parents attended regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences in 1997-98 and 1999-2000. This 50% attendance cutoff is a conservative one, since the goal would be to have all parents/guardians attend parent-teacher conferences. But for the current report it is representative of the general trends at other levels.

Parent contact at the elementary and middle schools increased in the first three years of the SALT Survey.

Figure 6: Attendance at Parent-Teacher Conferences

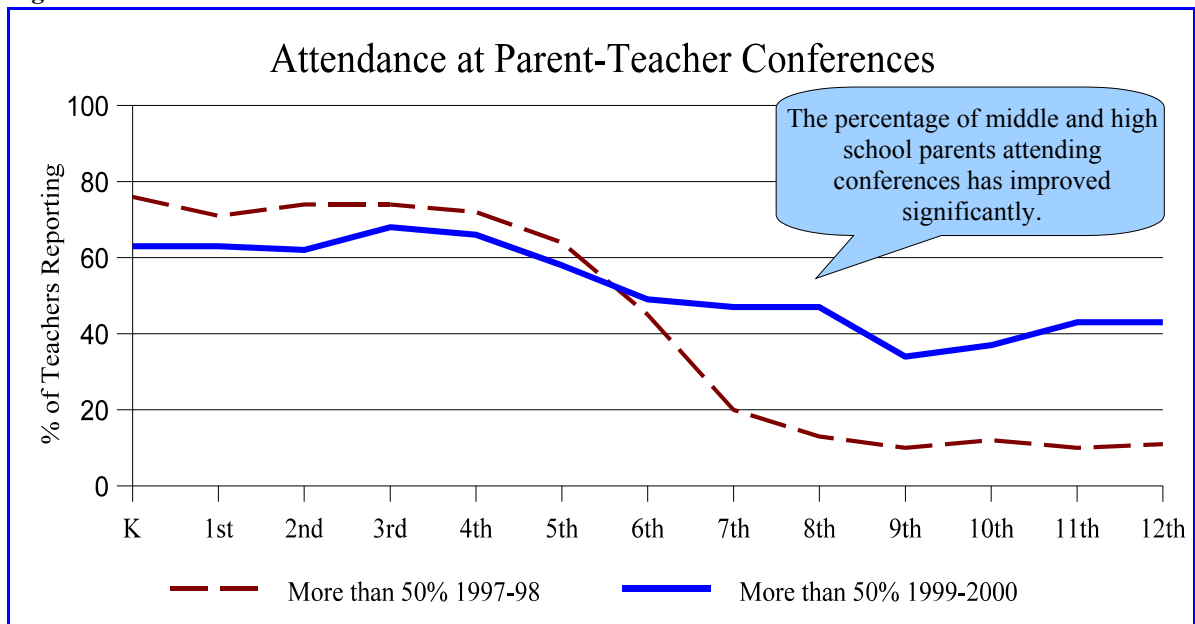


Figure 6 contains some information that both raises concerns as well as *provides some positive news*. As can be seen, far more parents of elementary students attend parent-teacher conferences than do parents of middle and high school students. In 1997-98 we saw a sharp decline in parental attendance at parent-teacher conferences beginning at the middle school and continuing through to the end of high school. Indeed, in 1997-98, less than 10% of high school teachers reported that at least half of their students' parents attended such conferences.

In 1997-98, less than 10% of high school teachers reported that at least half of their students' parents attended parent-teacher conferences.

The good news is that by 1999-2000, a dramatic increase in parental attendance at parent-teacher conferences can be seen at the middle and high school levels. The percentage of parents attending regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences at the middle and high school levels has improved significantly from 1997-98 to 1999-2000

Good News: The percentage of parents attending regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences at the middle and high school levels **improved** significantly from 1997-98 to 1999-2000, with a four-fold increase at the high school level!

(see **Figure 6**). Now, nearly 50% of middle school teachers report more than half their students' parents attend conferences and about 40% of high school teachers report more than half their students' parents come to parent-teacher conferences, *a four-fold increase!*

Figure 7: Attendance at Parent-Teacher Conferences

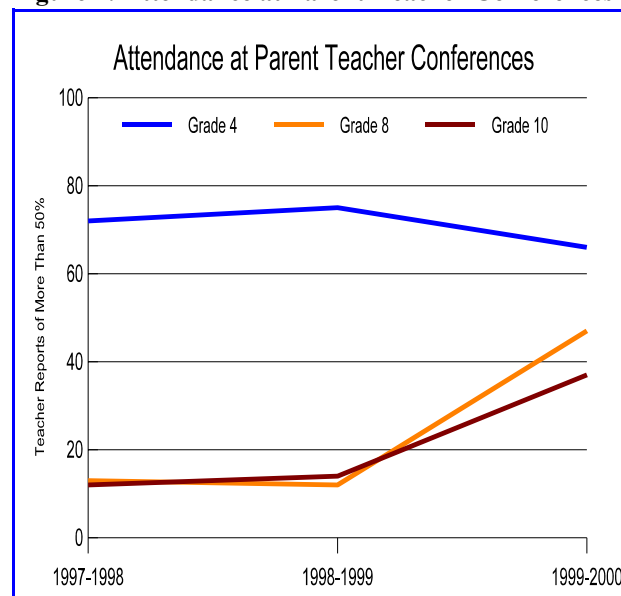
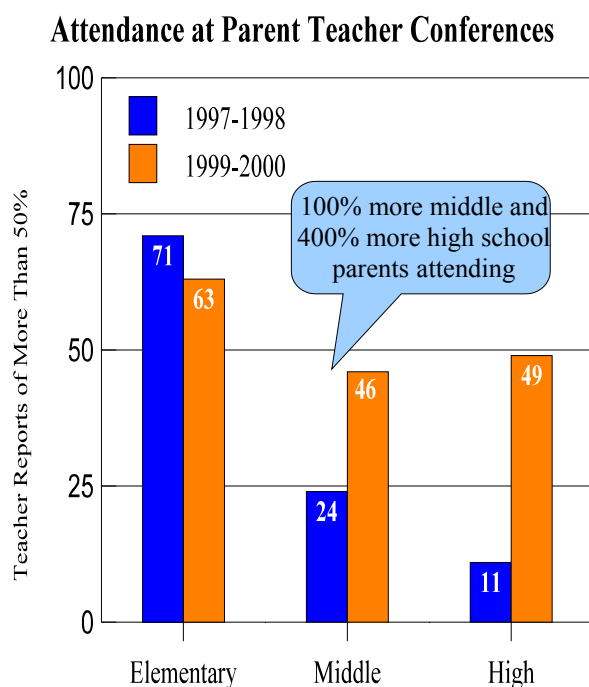


Figure 8: Attendance at Parent-Teacher Conferences



This pattern of increasing parent participation rates is illustrated and further clarified in **Figure 7** using data for Grades 4, 8, and 10. There, we can see the data for each of the three years in which SALT Survey data were collected. As can be seen in **Figure 7**, the greatest gains at the middle and high school levels occurred in the third year of surveying.

The information in **Figure 8** further illustrates the gains in parent attendance at parent-teacher conferences. Here we compare the first year of SALT Survey data with the most recent year. These data show clearly that twice as many parents of middle school students and four times as many parents of high school students are now attending parent-teacher conferences than did three years ago.

The coming year's (2001-2002) SALT Survey data will be critical for establishing whether these and other gains (e.g., those in parent contact) have continued or were mere "blips" in otherwise lower levels of involvement.

Summary of Views Toward and Levels of Parent Involvement

Rhode Island teachers and administrators consistently agree on the importance of parent involvement in students' education. This level of agreement diminishes slightly by grade level. The frequency of parent contact also decreases by building/grade level. Parent contact occurs most frequently at the elementary level, but it has increased in the past three years at the middle and high school levels, particularly in terms of parents attending regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences.

Fast Facts on Parent Contact

Generally, parent contact is,

- T greatest at the elementary school level.**
- T increasing in middle schools.**
- T lowest at the high school level.**
- T making the greatest gains at the middle and high school levels.**

SECTION II. Patterns and Trends in Practices to Involve Parents

What are the patterns and trends of efforts to involve parents by schools and teachers?

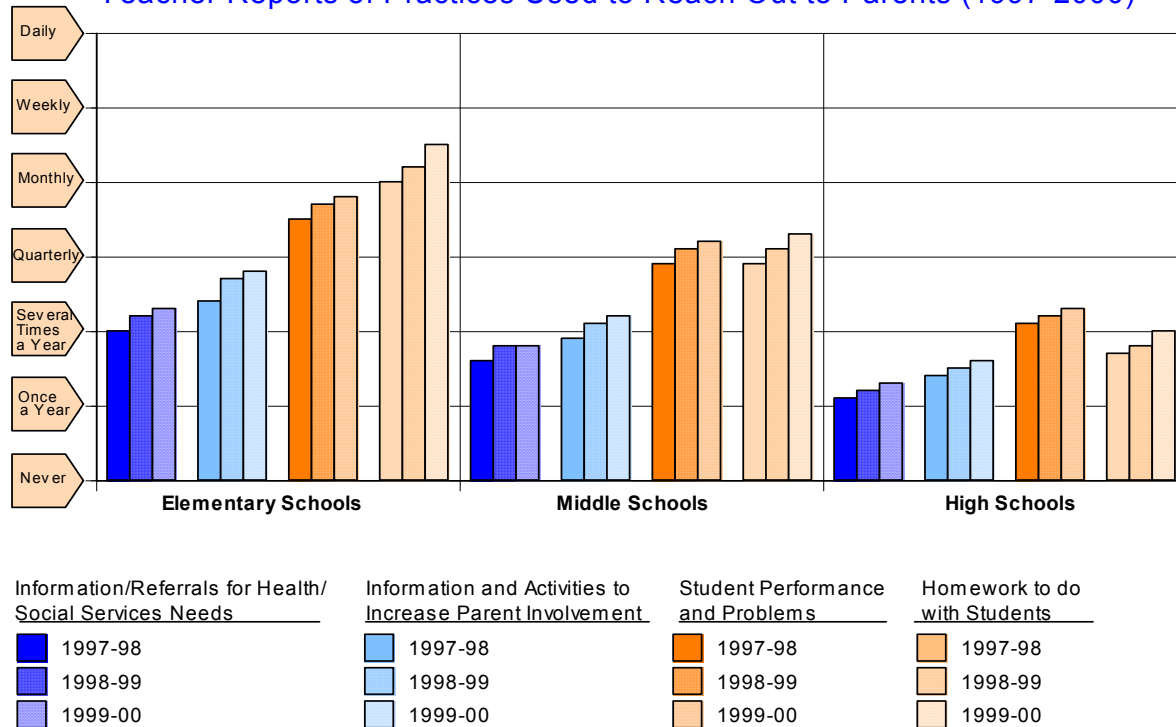
Examination of patterns and trends in the practices used by teachers and schools to engage parents may help us better understand the levels of parent contact we just discussed. Across nearly three decades of research, the Project on High Performance Learning Communities has consistently found clear relationships between the levels and types of practices schools use to engage parents and the levels and types of involvement reported by parents, teachers, and students. In addition, when teacher reports of such practices are considered in combination with the types of parent reports that we consider in the next section, they enable us to develop an understanding of necessary next steps for continuing to improve parent involvement in Rhode Island's schools.

Specifically, a primary focus of the current section is on responses to a set of SALT Survey questions that ask teachers about the frequency and nature of practices they employ to reach out to and involve parents. Here classroom teachers report on how often they contact parents either in writing, by telephone, or face-to-face, regarding the following:

Information/referrals for health and social services needed;
Information and activities to increase parent involvement;
Student performance and problems;
Homework to do with students; and
Specially called parent-teacher conferences to deal with pressing issues for specific students.

Figure 9: Teacher Reports of Practices Used to Reach Out to Parents

Teacher Reports of Practices Used to Reach Out to Parents (1997-2000)



In 1998-99 and 1999-2000, two thirds of Rhode Island teachers reported that they met at least once a week with specific parents to discuss specific student needs or concerns. These rates are slightly higher than those reported in the first year of SALT.

Figure 9 displays the frequencies with which teachers employ each set of research-based practices to engage families. The rates shown are at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, respectively, for each of the first three years of the SALT Survey process. As we can see, teachers in elementary schools employ each set of these practices far more often than do teachers in middle and high schools. Illustratively, **Figure 9** shows that teachers at the elementary level send home information about engaging students on homework at home slightly more than monthly, while those at the middle level do so approximately quarterly. High school teacher do so only two or three times per year. Similarly, teachers in the middle grades engage in efforts to involve parents more often than do those at the high school level.

What must be clear when these results are considered in light of those regarding actual levels of parent contact is that at the level of schooling where teachers more often

work to engage parents, they report more successful and higher levels of parent contact. This should be no surprise. But it also suggests that what some might see as the “inevitable” decline in parent contact and involvement with schools as students get older is truly not inevitable, but can be directly influenced by teacher practices.

When teachers use practices to reach out to and involve families more often, they report more successful and higher levels of parent contact.

Recall the rates of contact with parents and attendance at parent-teacher conferences reported in Section 1. Across grade levels, there are clear patterns of association between the rates at which teachers reach out to parents and engage in practices to involve parents and the degree to which they report parents’ contact with them and attendance at conferences. Although not the focus of the current report, we would be remiss if we did not report that, within Rhode Island’s and other *HiPlaces* schools, we find that within school levels, schools that report higher levels of teacher practices to engage parents also report higher levels of parent participation and see much smaller drop-offs in participation levels across years.

We also see clear increases each year across all grade levels and all areas in the frequency with which teachers report engaging in efforts to involve parents. These patterns are encouraging. Increased efforts appear to be reflected in teacher reports of increased parent contact described above and increased levels of contact reported by parents that are discussed in the next section.

It also seems that teachers’ efforts to communicate more regularly with parents are beginning to have an effect. At all grade levels, the increased frequency of practices focused on involving parents appears to lead to higher levels of parent involvement and commitment to partnerships with schools/teachers to enhance student learning, as reflected by attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other communication between parents and teachers. This is particularly true at the elementary and middle school levels where the gains in practices have been the largest and are at higher levels.

SECTION III. Experiences and Needs of Parents

What do parents report as their experiences and needs?

Our next set of analyses focuses on the types, levels, and patterns of change in parent reports of needs and experiences with teachers and schools.

Two SALT Surveys are distributed to parents: one to parents of elementary and middle school students and one to parents of high school students. The SALT Parent Surveys ask about their children's educational experiences with the school, as well as support or needs they would like to have the schools address. Specifically, parents respond to items that ask about:

their views of the school overall and in a number of specific areas;
the ways they are involved in their children's education;
the school's efforts to involve them;
additional support and information they would like about school subjects, workshops, and ways to support their children in school;
the general experience their child is having at the school;
their participation in school-based activities and involvement in decision making and other school governance practices; and
report on areas in which they feel their schools do a variety of tasks "well," "could do better," or "does not do."

For each of the three years of data collection in Rhode Island, an average of 30,000 parents of elementary school students, 9,000 parents of middle schools students, and 5,000 parents of high school students responded (see *The State of Education in Rhode Island: Lessons on the Progress, Implementation, and Impact of the Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES)*, Report 1, 2001).

Overall, more than 132,000 parent responses have been received over the three years. This total represents the number of families, not students for whom we have responses. Actually, many more students are represented because parents respond only for their oldest child at the school and families in Rhode Island usually have more than one child in school. With the median response representing the parents of two or more students in a family, over 85,000 students are represented annually. The experiences, views, and needs of the parents of these 85,000 students are represented by the responses that we report on below.

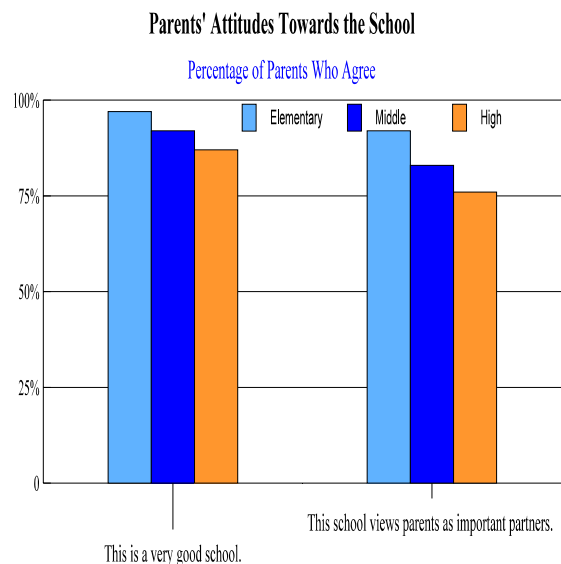
Rhode Island can feel good about parents' views of their children's schools. This good news is consistent with the data discussed above. Nearly all parents of elementary (97%) and middle (92%)

**Rhode Island can feel good about
parents' views of their
children's schools.**

school students and over 85% of parents of high school students feel their children's school is a good one (see **Figure 10**). Further, more than 90% of parents of elementary students feel their children's schools view them as important partners. Consistent with the decline in the efforts of schools to involve parents, this positive feeling decreases somewhat at the upper grade levels, where 83% and 76% of middle and high school parents, respectively, agree that the school views them as important partners. Still the vast majority of parents are quite positive.

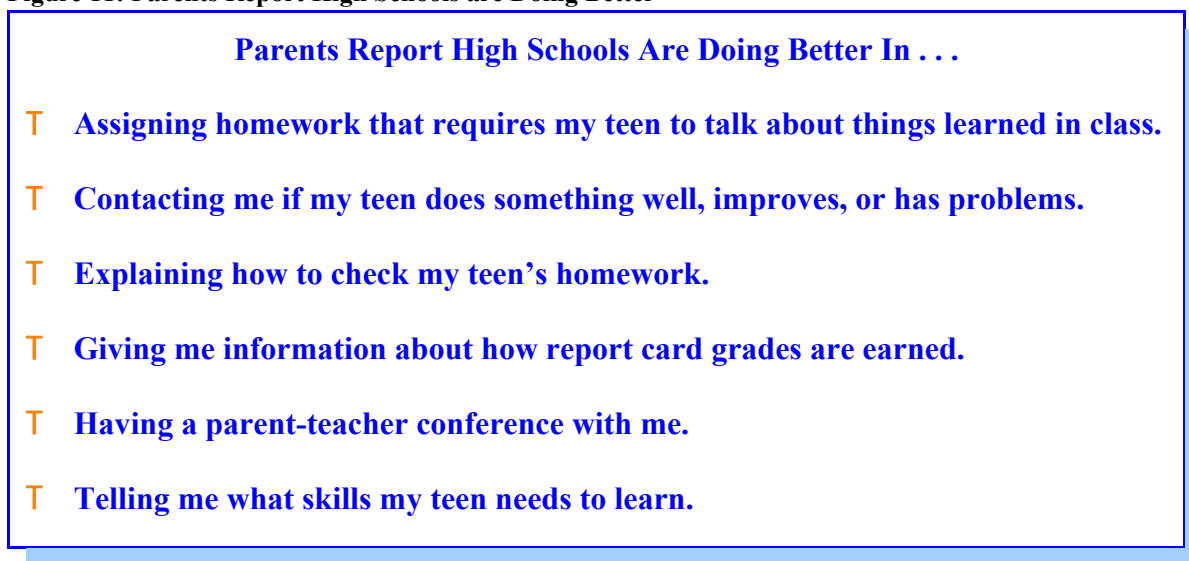
Parents also report on the ways in which, and how well, schools involve them in their children's education. For the most part, parent reports of schools' efforts to involve them in their children's education either at school or at home remained about the same for the three years. However, parents of high school students felt schools were doing better

Figure 10: Parents' Attitudes Toward The School



in some areas in 1999-2000 than in previous years. **Figure 11** shows some of the specific areas in which parents feel schools are doing a good job and high schools are improving.

Figure 11: Parents Report High Schools are Doing Better



Parent Involvement at the Personal Level

At the personal level, parent involvement includes communication between the school/teacher and the family, as well as the ways in which families support student learning at home. In this section we consider some of these issues in further detail.

School-Home Communication.

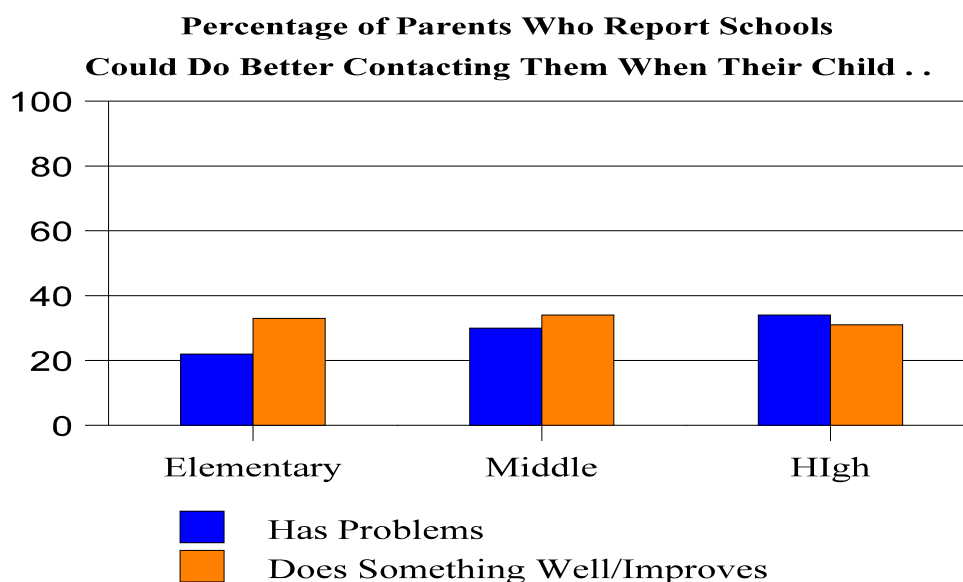
As indicated in Table 1, about half of the parents of elementary students who responded say they talked with teachers at school at least a few times each year. The percentage of parents of middle and high school students who responded that they had talked with teachers at school each year is somewhat less. Further, across all grade levels, about one-fifth of parents reported they had talked with teachers on the phone at least a few times.

Table 1. Percentage of parents who have talked with teachers *at least a few times* in 2000.

Parent-Teacher Communication	Elementary	Middle	High
Talked with the teacher at school	55%	44%	41%
Talked with the teacher on the phone	20%	21%	19%

When we asked parents about communication with teachers about their children's progress, about one third of parents at all grade levels report that schools could do better at contacting them when their child has a problem, does something well, or improves (see **Figure 12**).

Figure 12: Percentage of Parents Who Report Schools Could Do Better Contacting Them



Support for Student Learning At Home.

How, and how often, parents report directly engaging in student schoolwork at home varies by grade level. While approximately the same percentage of parents report they often discuss grades and the importance of school with their children, across grade levels, a higher percentage of parents of elementary students report working with their children on

homework and class and test preparation more often than do parents of middle and high school students (see Table 2). This is consistent with the patterns of teacher practices in these areas. Additionally, the majority of parents of high school students report they often talk with their teenagers about future plans for college or work and the importance of schooling (see Table 2).

Table 2. Percentage of parents reporting having done the following *many times* in 2000.

Support for Student Learning at Home	Elementary	Middle	High
Talked with my child about how important school is.	88%	86%	85%
Discussed grades on tests and homework.	81%	86%	79%
Helped my child with homework.	81%	57%	27%
Helped with/talked about a homework assignment.	NA¹	NA	53%
Practiced spelling or other skills before a test.	70%	49%	24%
Talked with my teen about future plans for college or work.	NA	NA	84%

¹ NA = Not asked at this level.

Rhode Island parents also support their children's literacy development at home, although this, too, varies by grade level (see Table 3). Parents of elementary students spend more time at home engaged with their children doing literacy activities than do parents of middle and high school students. Sixty to seventy percent of parents of elementary students frequently read with their children and listen to them read. One third to one half of parents of middle school students often engage in these activities. These trends are typical of national patterns. To some extent, they are understandable as student work becomes more complex and difficult for parents to engage in, but there is one area that makes the overall pattern of more concern. That is, only approximately one third of parents of high school students often listen to something their teens have written. This is an activity that all parents, whatever their children's grade level, should find easy to do. For the most part, the participation levels and percentages have not changed across the last three years.

Table 3. Percentage of parents reporting having done the following *many times* in 2000.

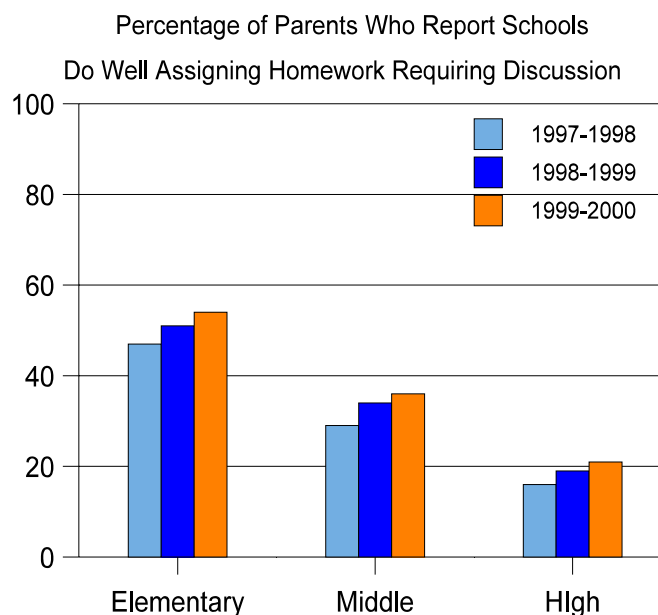
Support for Student Learning at Home Related to Literacy	Elementary	Middle	High
Read with my child.	71%	31%	NA ¹
Listened to my child read.	70%	36%	NA
Listened to a story my child wrote.	61%	50%	NA
Listened to my teen read something that he/she wrote.	NA	NA	37%

¹ NA = Not asked at that level.

By contrast to these general trends, when schools focus on outreach, positive changes take place. Parent reports corroborate with schools/teachers' reports of efforts to involve them more often in helping with homework. As indicated in **Figure 13**, a higher percentage of parents of

elementary school students report that schools do well at assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things they learned in class. At all grade levels parents report that schools are improving in this area.

Figure 13: Percentage of Parents Who Report Schools Do Well Assigning Homework Requiring Discussion



At all grade levels, parents report that **schools are improving** in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things they learned in class.

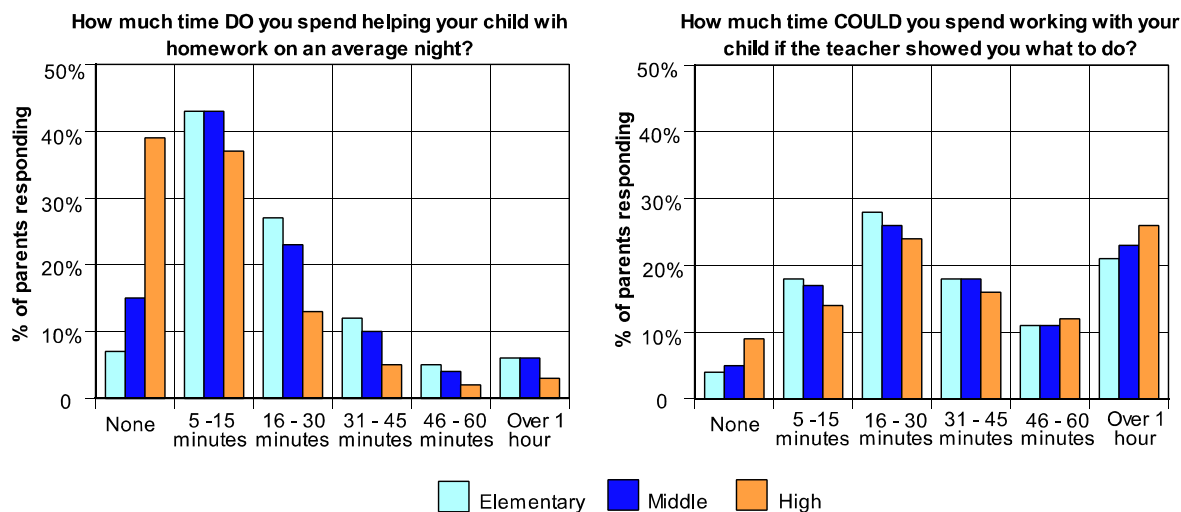
In **Figure 14**, parent reports of the time they spend helping their children with homework and the time they could spend working with them, if the teacher showed them what to do, are indicated. Perhaps one of the most consistent and important findings for school practices is that, across all grade levels, parents typically report that they could spend significantly more time engaged and interacting with their children about schoolwork *if the teacher(s) sent home suggestions or provided assistance in helping them know what to do*.

Parents at all grade levels report that they could spend significantly more time helping their children with homework if the teacher showed them what to do.

Additionally, parents would particularly like to know more about mathematics and study skills at the middle and high school levels and mathematics and reading skills at the elementary school level.

Given the significant gap between the percentage of students who score at proficient on state assessments and the percentage who are reported by teachers as performing below grade level, more extensive and effective engagement of parents as a learning resource would serve a critical strategy on which schools might build their efforts to teach “all kids” at high levels.

Figure 14: Parent Reports of Time Helping with Homework
Parent Reports of Time Helping with Homework (1999-2000)



Parent Involvement at the Participatory Level

Parent involvement at the participatory level includes volunteering at school, helping with school-sponsored events, and active participation in parent-teacher organizations. The surveys ask parents about the efforts of their children's schools to involve them in participatory activities. Parents report on schools' efforts to invite families to volunteer at school, help with fund-raising, attend PTA/PTO meetings and programs at school.

As indicated in **Figure 15**, and consistent with our other findings, a larger percentage of parents reported that elementary schools invited them to participate than did parents of middle and high school students. And a larger percentage of parents of middle school students reported their schools invited them to participate than do high school parents.

Parents report elementary schools invite them to participate more often than do parents of middle and high schools and they do participate more often.

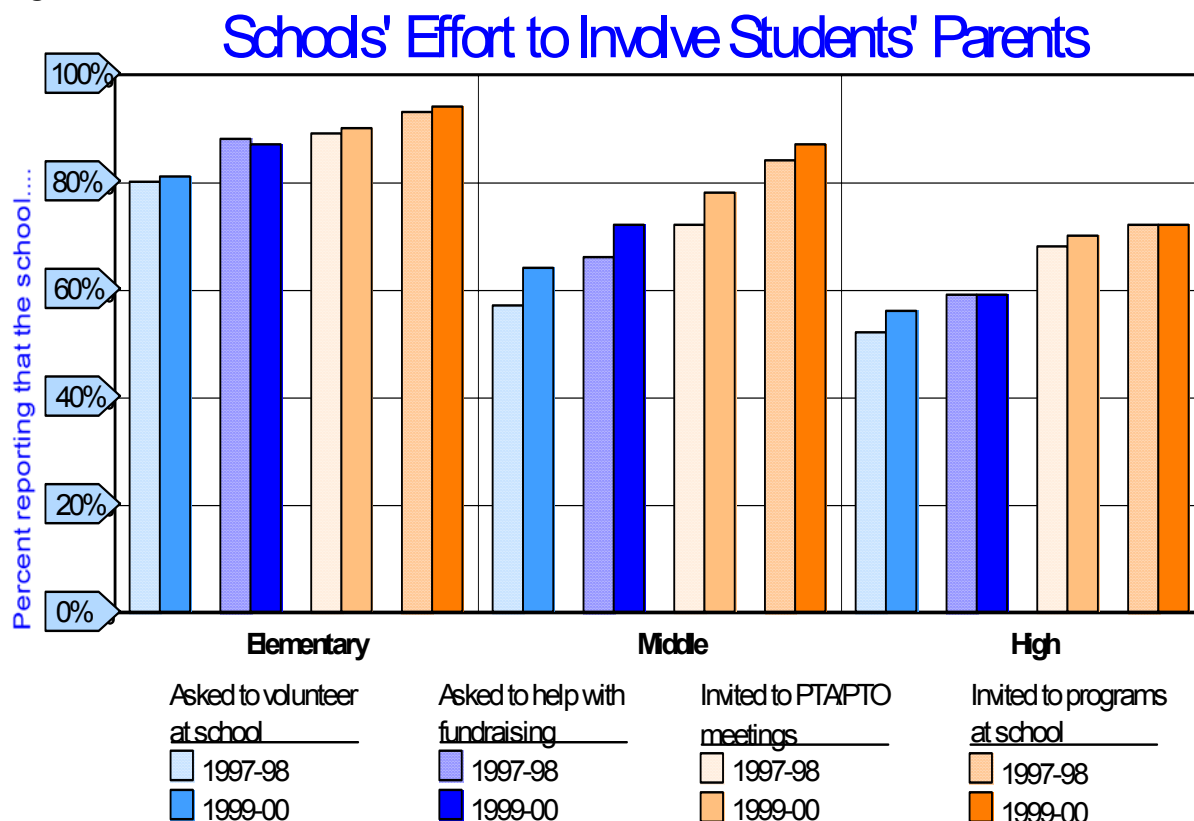
At the elementary level 80 - 90% of parents consistently reported that schools asked them to participate in multiple ways. Although a smaller percentage of parents (64 - 78%) reported middle schools invited them to participate, the percentage of parents reporting their school does a good job at inviting participation has increased at this level, reflecting middle schools' increasing efforts to involve families. The majority of parents of high school students continued to report that their children's schools could do more to invite parent participation.

For the most part, across grade levels, slightly more parents reported schools invited them to participate more in 1999-2000 than in 1997-98. In terms of specific areas of involvement, most families reported they visited their children's school or attended special events there at least a few times each year. A much smaller percentage volunteered at the school or attended parent-teacher organization.

More parents of elementary students report they are invited to participate than do parents of middle and high school students.

More parents report schools inviting participation in 1999-2000

Figure 15: Schools' Efforts to Involve Students' Parents



Parent Involvement at the Political/Governance Level

Parent involvement at the political level involves decision making and input regarding school governance and other policies. It encompasses active participation on school governance boards, school improvement teams, and school committees. On the SALT Surveys parents are asked about their participation on school-level committees.

Parents reported that schools include parents on curriculum and budget committees and school improvement teams more often at the elementary level than at the middle and high school levels.

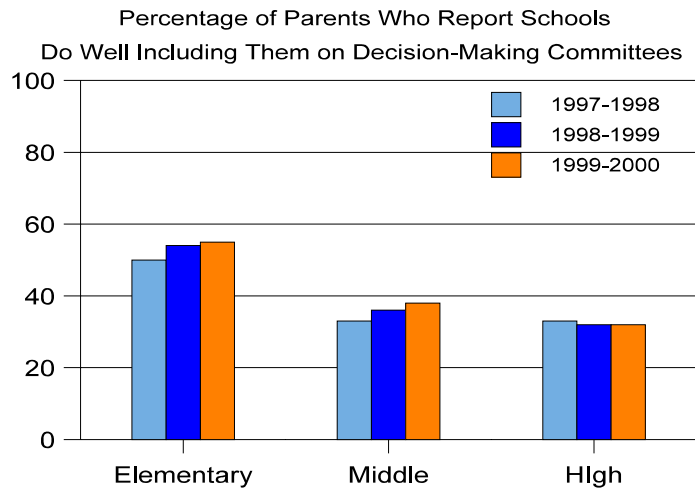
The majority of parents of elementary students feel their schools continue to do well in involving them in decision making, while only about one-third of parents of middle and high school students feel their schools do well in involving them in this way (see **Figure 16**). Parents of elementary and middle school students feel

their schools are improving in this area, while little change is reported at the high school level from 1997 to 2000. About 10% of parents at all levels would like more information about serving on a school committee or council.

Summary

The level of satisfaction with schools' efforts to engage parents and the frequency with which parents are involved in their children's education varies by grade level. Parents of elementary, middle, and high school students support their children's learning at home, yet again how and how extensively they did this varies by grade level. Parents of elementary school students report being engaged in their children's education at the personal, participatory, and political levels more often than do parents of middle and high school students. These parents may know more about what is happening in schools than parents of older students, therefore more effectively bringing together these two contexts of their children's lives. Parents at all grade levels engage more often in supportive practices at the personal level (e.g., literacy activities) than at the participatory and political levels. And parents at all grade levels report they are willing to spend even more time doing so, if provided with support and guidance from their children's teachers. Now let us look at the responses from the students.

Figure 16: Percentage of Parents Who Report Schools Do Well Including Them on Decision-Making Committees



SECTION IV. Student Experiences of School-Family Partnerships

What are student experiences of teacher/school-family partnerships and how do they relate to student performance and achievement?

By examining student reports of their experiences related to teacher/school-family partnerships, we may better understand the relationships between teacher practices, family experiences, and student experiences.

More than 81,000 Rhode Island students in grades 4 through 12 annually completed the SALT Survey. Consistent with their distribution by grade level, approximately 30% were elementary students in grades 4-6, 35% were middle school students, and 36% were high school students. Overall, more than 70,000 elementary student responses in grades 4-6, 83,000 middle school student responses and 88,000 high school student responses to the SALT Survey have been received over the period 1997-2000.

Among a large number of other issues which are discussed in other reports, a subset of survey elements asks for student reports on their academic expectations, some of the ways in which their families engage them in activities related to their education, and how often their families and their teachers talk with each other. Students respond to questions such as,

Do you think you will do better in school next year?

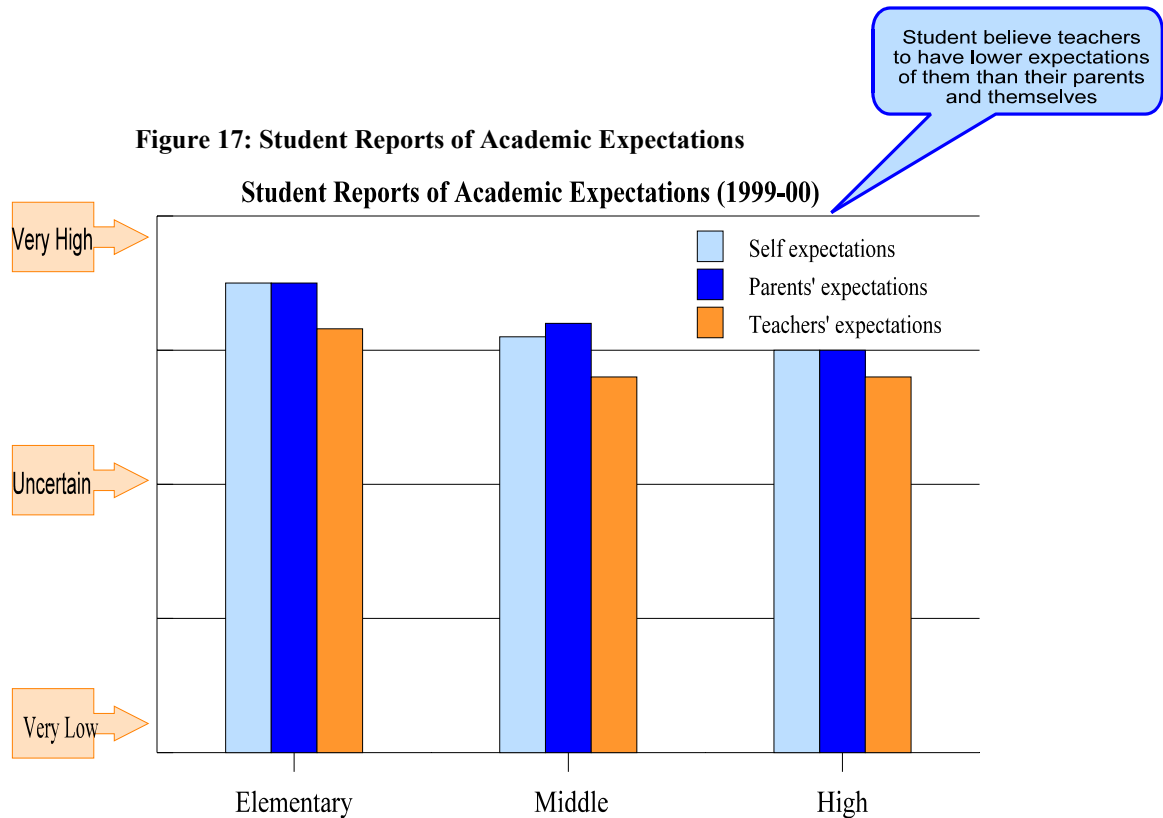
Do you think your parents/ guardians think you will do better in school next year?

Do you think your teachers think you will do better in school next year?

How often do your parents/ guardians help you with your homework?

How often do your parents/ guardians talk with your teachers about how you are doing in school?

How often do your parents/ guardians go to school activities or meetings?



Student Academic Expectations

For each of the first three years of the SALT process, students reported on how well they thought they would do in school next year, if they thought they would graduate from high school, and if they thought they would go to college. They also reported on their perception of their parents'/guardians' and teachers' views of their academic potential. As you can see on the graph in **Figure 17**, students' feelings about their own academic potential remained relatively high in elementary and middle school, as did their views of their parents' expectations of them. High school students' expectations are slightly lower than those of middle school students and significantly lower than those of elementary school students.

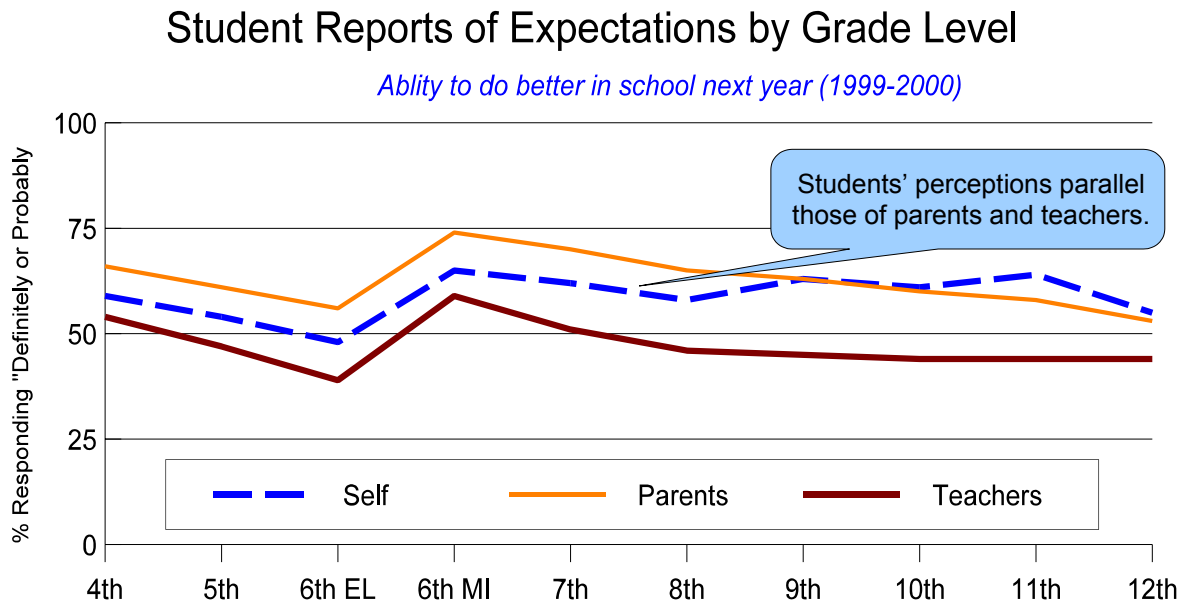
Also indicated in **Figure 17**, at each grade level, students' academic expectations for themselves typically matched those of their parents. What is most striking about these responses is that students at each grade level perceive both their families and themselves as having higher expectations concerning their academic potential than do their teachers.

- T Students' academic expectations for themselves match those of their parents.**
- T Students perceive their teachers as holding significantly lower expectations of their academic potential than do either their parents or themselves.**

This pattern is consistent *across* various groups of students in Rhode Island. That is, the pattern remains the same when we looked at students by grade level, gender, economic status, ethnicity, after-school status, and the number of books they have read outside of school work in the past three months.

Differences in levels of reports of student academic expectations did not vary *within* most groups. Two exceptions to this pattern were found. After elementary school, boys had lower academic expectations for themselves and viewed their parents and teachers as having lower academic expectations of them than did girls.

Figure 18: Student Reports of Expectations by Grade Level



The other difference was in students' perceptions of their ability to do better in school next year by grade level. As indicated in **Figure 18**, students' self perceptions parallel their views of how they think their parents and teachers think they will perform in school next year. More students across grade levels felt their parents thought they would definitely or probably do better in school next year, while fewer students felt their teachers thought they would do better next year.

Another interesting pattern in **Figure 18** can be seen within the grade level responses for elementary and middle schools where the two overlap. Notice there are two 6th grades on the graph: one for 6th graders in elementary school and one for 6th graders in middle school. Students in 6th grade in middle school report higher expectations than did student in 6th grade in elementary school. Similarly, whether in elementary or middle school, within each school level, students in the upper grades report lower expectations when compared to their schoolmates in lower grades in the same school levels. Throughout high school, the percentage of students who reported they felt they definitely or probably will do better in school next year was about the same as students at the beginning of elementary and middle school.

Of particular note regarding student expectations is that students in the last grade of elementary and middle school reported lower academic expectations than did students in the beginning grade of the next school level. For example, students in 6th grade in elementary school seem to have lower expectations for doing better next year than do students in 6th grade in middle school. Eighth graders also indicate having lower expectations than do ninth graders. This may be a reflection of anxiety about transitioning to a new school and the anticipation of students or tasks being far more difficult, followed by relief over the anxiety.

High school students' own perceptions of being able to do better in school next year more closely match their parents, but the gap widens between how well students think they will do and their view of how well they think their teachers think they will do, at least until 12th grade.

In summary, as teachers work to become more effective partners with parents, it is critical that they both close the gap between how students view the expectations held by teachers and parents and then, jointly, move toward raising their expectations for all students. Of course, expectations do not exist in a vacuum. Report #1 in this series on the State of Education in Rhode Island makes clear that teachers' views and expectations are influenced by the academic competencies and skills students have. There, a clear recommendation for practice is that if teacher expectations are to be significantly increased, schools must directly focus on providing instruction and using instructional strategies that enhance the learning skills and competencies of students. So, too, must higher education better prepare teachers in developing this type of learning for K-12 students, in addition to content and conceptual foci. (For further discussion of this issue, see *The State of Education in Rhode Island: Lessons on the Progress, Implementation, and Impact of the Comprehensive Education Strategy (CES)*, Report 1, 2001).

Family Involvement in Education

Students also report on how often they and their families do things together that are related to their education. These activities include:

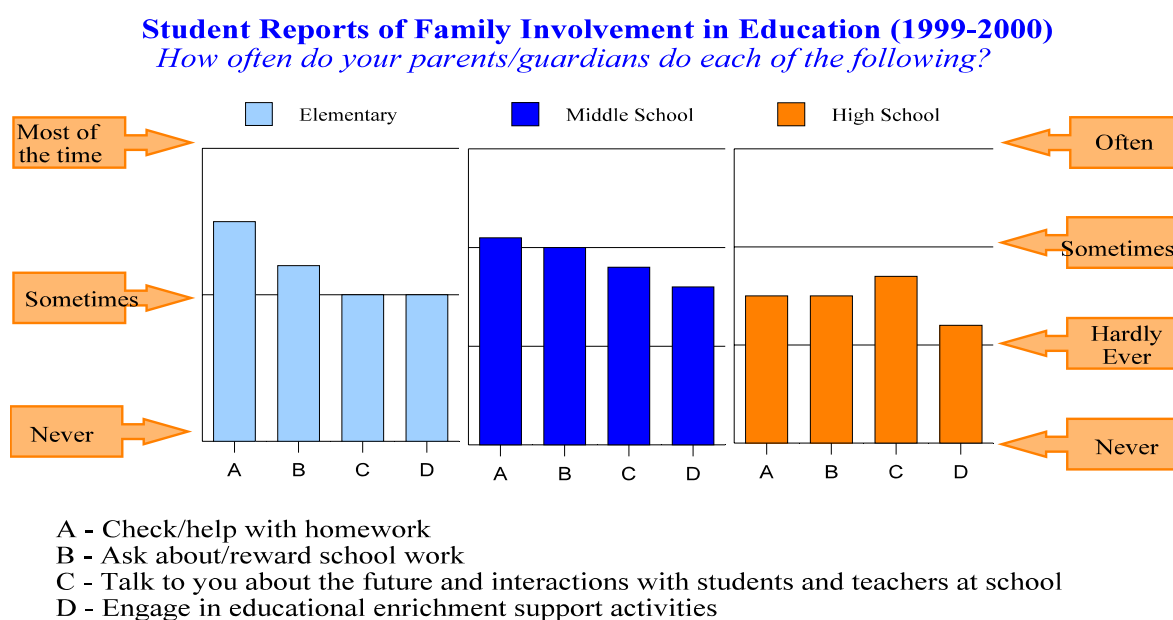
**checking or helping with homework,
asking about or rewarding them for school work,
talking about the future and their interactions with classmates and teachers, and
engaging in educational and enrichment support activities.**

Overall, students reported no meaningful changes in how often they and their families engage in these types of activities across the three years. As can be seen in **Figure 19**, elementary and middle school students report they and their families engage in education-related activities more often than do high school students. Activities related to homework are reported by elementary and middle school students to happen most often. High school students report that they and their families talk about the future and their

interactions at school more often than other types of education-related activities. Student reports, across grade levels, concur with parent and teacher reports of checking/helping with homework that were discussed above.

High school students reported that they *hardly ever* engage in educational and enrichment support activities with their families. This may be indicative of their developing independence, as well as the general trends in practices and school outreach we have seen earlier in this report.

Figure 19: Student Reports of Family Involvement in Education

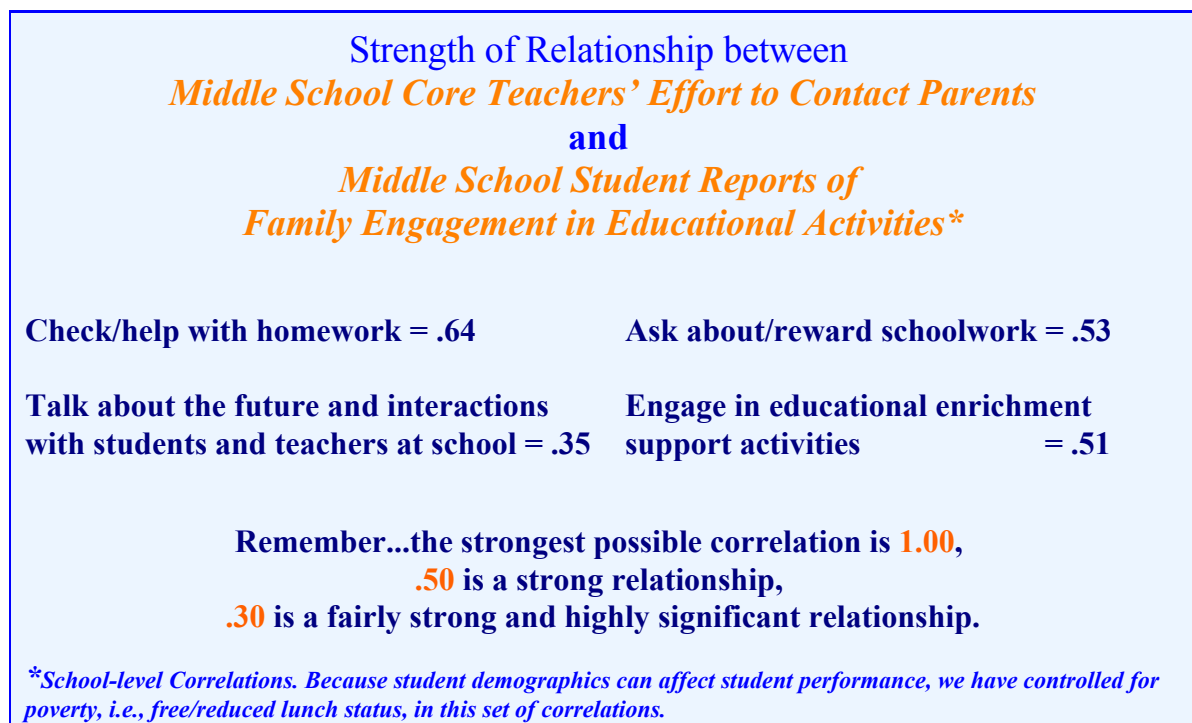


Perhaps most important for understanding and thinking through these patterns of parent-student interactions is our finding that when teachers contact parents more often to engage them in partnerships across levels, including those above the elementary level, students report they and their parents engage in these activities more often. These relationships are represented in **Figure 20**. This is a critical finding for efforts to enhance achievement. Across our analyses relating to parent involvement, the single most consistent pathway between parent involvement and student performance and achievement was the one that went:

Teacher Practices ➡ Parent Involvement at Home with Child ➡ Student Achievement

That is, the degree to which students reported that their families more often engaged them in learning and schoolwork-related activities at home was directly related both to how often teachers sent home information or suggestion about how to do so and to student performance and achievement as reflected in statewide assessments and teacher reports of students' school performance.

Figure 20: Relationships Between Middle School/Teacher Efforts to Engage Parents and Student Reports of Family Involvement in Education



When we examine student reports of family involvement in their education disaggregated by their gender, economic status, ethnicity, grade level, after-school status, and the number of books they have read outside of school work in the past three months, we see some slightly different patterns (see Table 4). Somewhat surprisingly, student reports of family involvement in their education differ little or not at all by gender, economic status, ethnicity, and at the elementary school level, by grade. However, middle and high school students, students at all grade levels who spend a lot of time home alone after school, and those who have read no books in the past three months report that they are actually engaged with their families concerning their education less often than do other students.

Table 4. Differences in Family Involvement Activities By Student Characteristics

Group 1	Levels of Frequency of Family Involvement Activities	Group 2
Boys	↔	Girls
Eligibility for free/reduced lunch	↔	Full paid lunch
White	↔	Non-white
Elementary	↓	Middle High
Less than three hours a week home alone after school	↓	Three or more hours a week home alone after school
Reading at least one book in past three months	↓	Reading no books in past three months



indicates no difference between the two groups.



indicates the *second group's* reports were lower than those of the first group.

These are important issues for schools to consider in developing partnerships with families to support student learning. Certain student characteristics are unchangeable, such as gender, ethnicity, and even at times, economic status. These characteristics are often “blamed” or used to excuse less successful or less focused efforts to engage parents with their children’s education. Our findings indicate that such explanations are, in fact, certainly insufficient, if not wrong, and that these conditions play little role in parent involvement levels. By contrast, not surprisingly, parent involvement is influenced by and/or related to conditions that are intertwined with actual engagement (e.g., student reading outside of school) and, at the extremes, the amount of time available to the student and parent for such engagement in a given day.

If teachers, schools, and families work together, they can focus attention on the contexts of students' lives that lead to spending a lot of time home alone, reading a few or no books (e.g., development of after-school programs and homework support clubs), and programs and practices that more fully engage and support families as educational partners with schools. We discuss these and other issues regarding what matters most for supporting student outcomes in the next section.

SECTION V. Future Directions to Enhance Parent Involvement

What do the findings tell us about future directions to enhance parent involvement in Rhode Island schools?

In this section we attempt to briefly provide some understandable and possible lessons for action based on the preceding pages. Across analyses with Rhode Island and other data, our research indicates that it is not just any family involvement that matters, but the type of family involvement that matters to student performance and achievement. As we move toward such successful parent-school partnerships, it is clear that Rhode Island has built a sound foundation and begun to make significant progress in most areas.

As discussed above, teachers and administrators believe that parent involvement in education is essential for the students in their schools. Parents report they feel Rhode Island schools view them as important partners and generally have strong, positive feelings about their children's schools. These are important prerequisites for successful actions for building school-family partnerships.

What Matters Most to Teachers?

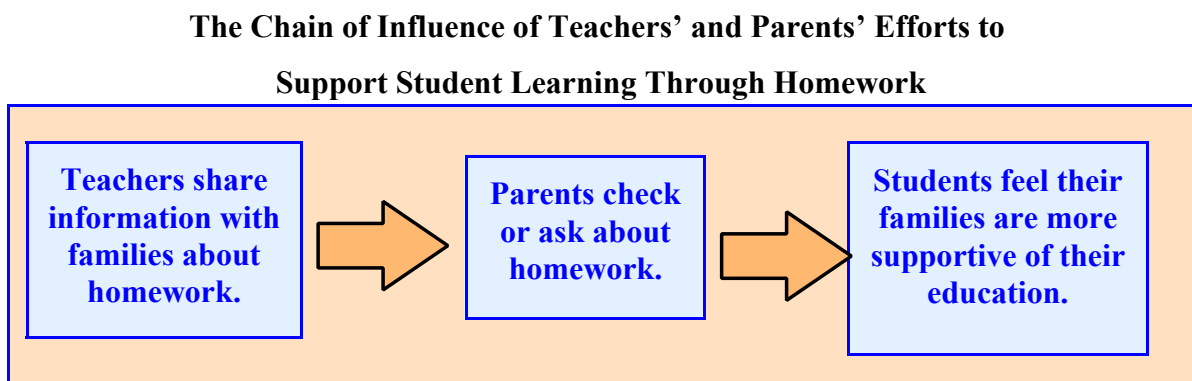
Communication. Communication that is meaningful, positive, and frequent is a key to positive school-family partnerships. Teachers at all levels are focusing on contacting parents more often about their children's progress. Further, they have been successful in drawing parents to schools for regular meetings. Above, we reported increases in the percentage of families attending parent-teacher conferences over the first three years. Beyond conferences and report cards, teachers are also communicating with families more often on a number of other important issues, including information about health and social services, activities to increase parent involvement, student performance and problems, and homework to do with students. These patterns are key, as sharing information with parents

on how to help their children with class work and homework is significantly and positively related to students' perception of positive family support of their learning. **Figure 21** illustrates this sequence of influence.

What Matters Most to Families?

Contact. Contacting parents about their individual child's progress and providing guidance on ways to assist their children with school work are what families want most. Most Rhode Island families are willing and able to spend more time supporting student learning at home. They may need to know more about how to help their children learn. But to do so, they are calling on teachers for greater engagement in how to provide such help to their children with these issues.

Figure 21: Chain of Influence of Teachers' and Parents' Efforts to Support Student Learning Through Homework



Critically, Rhode Island teachers want to know more about how to involve families in their children's education. Each year teachers at all grade levels reported they wanted or needed significant levels of additional staff development in working with families to involve them in education, yet they received little or no professional development in this area. This lack of focused professional development makes it all the more surprising that at each grade/building level improvements have been made and is a credit to teachers' hard work and innovation.

Clearly, teacher education, professional development, and school structures (e.g., teaming at middle/ secondary levels) all need to be focused on providing teachers with skills, structures, and time required to provide higher levels of information and support to parents.

- T Critically, Rhode Island teachers want to know more about how to involve families in their children’s education.**
- T Each year teachers at all grade levels reported they wanted or needed significant levels of additional staff development in working with families to involve them in education.**
- T Yet they have *received little or no* professional development in this area.**

What Matters Most to Students?

Discussing homework. Of all the ways families are involved in their children’s education, students’ perception of family support for their education is most strongly linked to homework and the degree to which they are comfortable with and complete it. Students whose families discuss homework with them more often feel their families are more supportive of their academic attainment and outcomes. Further, our work shows that parents have higher expectations of students who complete homework assignments and, not surprisingly, such students get better grades and have higher levels of achievement.

Teachers and parents working together clearly have a greater impact on students than each group working separately. The sum then becomes greater than the parts. This is key to closing the statewide assessment gap between where students are and 100% proficiency rates.

Next Steps

Family involvement in Rhode Island schools is showing positive gains. Rhode Island teachers, administrators, parents, and students report small changes, and sometimes large ones, in many areas. More schools are holding regularly scheduled parent-teacher

conferences. Far greater percentages of parents are attending them. Teachers and parents are communicating more often. Teachers are involving families with homework more often.

As Epstein noted, “We need to be realistic in our expectations for parent involvement as part of effective school programs. Parent involvement can help, not cure, the problems of weak school programs, of children who miss opportunities, and of families who feel confused about their children and the schools” (cited in Murphy, Beck, Crawford, Hodges, and McGaughy, 2001, pg. 228). Rhode Island schools can facilitate the further development of school/teacher-family partnerships by providing professional development and implementing pivotal structures, such as teaming and common planning time, that lead to ensuring success for all students. Teaming enables students and teachers to develop closer relationships that help teachers support and understand the educational needs of individual students. Our research over the past three decades has shown that teaming and adequate common planning time for teachers to work together for instructional change play a significant role in improving the social climate and work environment for students, teachers, and parents. This is particularly so at the middle and high school levels.

Our prior research has also helped to clarify some of the structural and organizational reasons that may help to explain some of the dramatic decline in parent contact and involvement we find after elementary school. In schools where teachers are engaged together on teams, and have common planning time, particularly at the middle and secondary level, these structures provide far greater capacity and opportunity to reach out to parents and engage them. Illustratively, in traditionally organized middle and secondary schools teachers may see 60-180 students each day, some of whom they share with one or two other teachers but typically with the mix constantly changing and with the teacher usually having little more than 45-60 minutes per day with a student. Such conditions make it hard to get to know students well and create the daunting task of each teacher having to contact and get to know 100 or more parents. By contrast, when students are organized into teams and teachers have common planning time they can work together to reach out to

parents, to get to know and work collectively on issues of student needs, and in the development of materials that can be sent home to parents that cut across student courses and lead to more effective integration. We have also repeatedly found that teachers in such organizational structures feel far more effective and able to engage students and parents.

The State and schools need to work to ensure that efforts are made to recognize the efforts families are making to support student learning. Families in Rhode Island, as in the rest of our country, are very busy. Many parents work full time. Students participate in extra-curricular activities and parents are busy driving them and often playing other roles, such as coaches, leaders or tutors. Not coming to school does not mean parents are not concerned with their children's education.

Parent involvement in education occurs at many levels and changes as students progress through school. Rhode Island parents are highly involved at the personal level. Expecting all families to demonstrate their involvement in education at the participatory and/or political levels may be unrealistic, and, indeed, these approaches seem less central to student learning. As teachers learn more about research-based approaches to working with families to involve them in education, their perceptions of parental concern with their children's education may change, too.

Families of middle and high school students and those whose children spend a lot of time alone after school and/or who are less involved in academically-related pursuits after school (e.g., do not read books) need to recognize the impact of these situations and work with schools to address them. These families are often in need of other support services. Classroom teachers, particularly at the elementary school level, are making additional attempts to provide families with information on health and social services. Greater efforts are beginning in middle and high schools.

Schools need to learn to communicate in a variety of ways with all families so they can support their children's education. To be effective partners, parents need to know what

is happening in schools and what is expected of them so they can work with schools to create a learning environment that ensures success for all students.

Participatory practices, such as volunteering at school and joining the PTA/PTO, are ways parents can learn more about what transpires at school. These types of practices may also lead to more opportunities to talk with the staff. Yet not all parents can participate at school during the day. Teachers may want to learn more parent involvement strategies that work for the diverse populations and variety of households that are represented in their schools.

Examining their SALT Survey information will help schools recognize the efforts families are making and identify and enhance ways they can increase positive partnerships to support the learning of all students. The goal is to keep communication open, current, and focused on assisting parents in being effective partners with teachers. For, as we noted at the beginning of this report, students whose families are more knowledgeable, supportive, and involved in their education perform better academically and exhibit more positive attitudes toward school, have higher expectations, and exhibit more positive behaviors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

As Rhode Island schools move toward comprehensive school reform, the roles and responsibilities of teachers, administrators, and parents have shifted and been redefined. Nowhere is this more evident than for parents' roles in schools and the education of their children. To be effective partners with teachers and schools, parents need to know what is happening in their children's classrooms, how they can work with and support school programs, and how to create learning environments at home.

This report discusses a set of findings about family involvement and engagement in Rhode Island's schools. It is based on information collected during the first three years of the SALT Survey process. This information represents more than 1,200 survey reports from administrators, 25,000 from teachers, 135,000 from parents, and 254,000 from students across over 300 schools in Rhode Island.

The overarching questions that are addressed in this report are:

- , How do educators view the importance of parent involvement?
- , What are the levels and trends of parent involvement in Rhode Island during the first three years of the SALT process?
- , What are the patterns and trends of efforts to involve parents by schools and teachers?
- , What do parents report as their experiences and needs?
- , What are student experiences of teacher/school-family partnerships and how do they relate to student performance and achievement?
- , What do the findings tell us about future directions to enhance parent involvement in Rhode Island schools?

Key Findings

Educators' Views and Levels of Parent Involvement

Rhode Island teachers and administrators typically see family involvement as an essential building block of effective education.

- Support for the importance of parental involvement in students' education decreases by building/grade level for both teachers and administrators. (Section I, page 6)
- The vast majority of Rhode Island classroom teachers and administrators **at all three building/grade levels--elementary, middle, and high school**--reported they felt that a broad array of parent involvement in education is *essential to effective education* for the students they teach. (Section I, pages 5-6)
- There was a dramatic decline in the degree to which teachers report they have contact with parents as students progress through elementary, middle, and high schools across the first three years of SALT data collection. (Section I, pages 7-8)
- Generally, parent contact is greatest at the elementary school level, lowest at the high school level. (Section I, pages 9-10)
- Despite this downward trend across grade/building levels, there has been a gradual, but consistent, increase in the level of parent contact at the elementary and middle schools each year. (Section I, pages 10-11)
- The greatest gains in parent contact are where it started lowest, i.e., at the middle and high school levels. (Section I, page 11)

Patterns and Trends in Practices to Involve Parents

The SALT Survey asks teachers about the *frequency* and *nature* of practices they use to reach out to and involve parents. Classroom teachers reported how often they contacted parents either in writing, by telephone, or face-to-face, regarding:

- information/referrals for health and social services
 - information and activities to increase parent involvement
 - student performance and problems
 - homework to do with students
 - specially called parent-teacher conferences to deal with pressing issues for specific students.
- Teachers in elementary schools employed each set of the above practices far more often than did teachers in middle and high schools. (Section II, page 14)
- When teachers reported using practices to reach out to and involve families more frequently, they also reported more successful and higher levels of parent contact. This suggests that parent contact with schools and teachers does not inevitably decline as students get older, but can be directly influenced by teacher practices. (Section II, page 15)

- At all grade levels, increased frequency of practices by teachers to involve parents appears to lead to higher levels of commitment by parents to partnerships with schools/teachers to enhance student learning. This is reflected in increased attendance at parent-teacher conferences and other communication between parents and teachers when teachers more often use the research-based practices examined here. (Section II, page 15)

Experiences and Needs of Parents

The SALT Parent Surveys asked parents about their children's educational experiences with the school, as well as support or needs they would like to have the schools address. Rhode Island can feel good about parents' views of their children's schools.

- Nearly all parents of elementary (97%) and middle (92%) school students and over 85% of parents of high school students agree or strongly agree that their children's school is a good one. (Section III, page 17)
- More than 90% of parents of elementary students feel their children's schools view them as important partners. Hence, 83% and 76% of middle and high school parents, respectively, agree that the school views them as important partners. This decline across grade levels is consistent with the decline in the efforts of schools to involve parents across grade levels. (Section III, page 17)
- Parent reports of schools' efforts to involve them in their children's education either at school or at home remained about the same for the three years. Parents of elementary school students reported that these schools invited them to participate more often than did parents of middle and high school students; parents of elementary school students participate in school activities the most often. (Section III, pages 23-24)
- At all grade levels, parents reported that schools are improving in assigning homework that requires their children to talk with them about things they learned in class. (Section III, page 21)
- Parents at all grade levels reported that they could spend significantly more time engaged with their children with homework *if the teacher communicated with them about what to do*. (Section III, page 22)
- Given the small percentage of students who score proficient on state assessments, more extensive and effective engagement of parents as a learning resource would serve as a critical strategy to teach "all kids" at high levels. (Section III, page 22)

Student Experiences of School-Family Partnerships

A subset of items on the SALT Survey asks for *student reports* on how often their families and their teachers talk with each other; teacher, parent, and their own academic expectations; and some of the ways in which their families engage them in activities related to their education. These activities include:

- checking or helping with homework
 - asking about or rewarding them for school work
 - talking about the future and their interactions with classmates and teachers
 - engaging in educational and enrichment support activities
- Students' feelings about their own academic potential remained relatively high in elementary and middle school, as did their views of their parents' expectations of them. High school students' expectations were slightly lower than those of middle school students and significantly lower than those of elementary school students. (Section IV, pages 27-28)
 - At each grade level, students' academic expectations for themselves typically matched those of their parents. At each grade level, students perceive their families and themselves to have higher expectations than their teachers regarding their academic potential. This pattern remains constant across grade levels, gender, economic status, ethnicity, after-school status, and the number of books read outside of school work in the past three months. (Section IV, page 28)
 - Parent activities related to homework are reported most frequently by elementary and middle school students. High school students reported that their families talk about the future and their interactions at school more often than other types of education-related activities. (Section IV, pages 30-31)
 - When teachers contact parents more often to engage them in partnerships across levels, particularly at the middle school level, students report they and their parents engage in these activities more often. (Section IV, pages 31-32)
 - Although student reports of family involvement in their education differ little or not at all by gender, economic status, and ethnicity, students at all grade levels who spend a lot of time home alone after school, and those who have read no books in the past three months report that they are engaged with their families concerning education less often than do other students. (Section IV, page 33)

Future Directions to Enhance Parent Involvement

As we move toward successful school/teacher-family partnerships, it is clear that Rhode Island has built a sound foundation and begun to make significant progress in most areas. Teachers and administrators believe that parent involvement in education is essential for the students in their schools. Parents report they feel Rhode Island schools view them as important partners and generally have strong, positive feelings about their children's schools. These are important prerequisites for successful actions in building school/teacher-family partnerships. These data also provide some clear direction about useful next steps.

- Rhode Island teachers want to know more about how to involve families in their children's education. Each year teachers at all grade levels reported they wanted or needed significant levels of additional staff development in working with families to

involve them in education. However, SALT reports reveal that most teachers received little or no professional development in this area. Teacher education, professional development, and school structures (e.g., teaming at middle/secondary levels) need to be focused on providing teachers with skills, structures, and time required to provide higher levels of information and support to parents. (Section V, page 36)

- Rhode Island schools can facilitate the further development of school/teacher-family partnerships by providing *professional development* and implementing pivotal structures, such as *teaming* and *common planning time*, that lead to ensuring success for all students. In schools where teachers are engaged together on teams, and have common planning time, particularly at the middle and high school levels, these structures provide far greater capacity and opportunity to reach out to and engage parents. (Section V, page 36-37)
- Contacting parents about their individual child's progress and providing guidance on ways to assist their children with school work are what families want most. Most Rhode Island families are willing and able to spend more time supporting student learning at home. They may need to know more about how to help their children learn. But to do so, they are calling on teachers for greater engagement in how to provide such help to their children with these issues. (Section V, page 36)
- Schools need to learn to communicate in a variety of ways with all families so they can support their children's education. To be effective partners, parents need to know what is happening in schools and what is expected of them so they can work with schools to create a learning environment that ensures success for all students. (Section V, page 39-40)

Conclusions

Perhaps most important for understanding and thinking through these patterns of parent-student interactions is our research which indicates that when teachers contact parents more often to engage them in partnerships across levels, particularly at the middle school level, students report they and their parents engage in these activities more often. Also, our work and that of others shows that students who report that their families more often engage in these activities have more positive adjustment, more favorable experiences, and score at higher levels of academic performance and achievement.

Examining SALT Survey information will help schools recognize the efforts families are making and identify and enhance the ways schools can increase positive partnerships, which will support the learning of all students. The goal is to keep communication open, current, and focused on assisting parents in being effective partners with teachers and schools to help all students achieve and perform at high levels.

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